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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1869
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1736
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2305
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2712
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000925

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: DELUGE OF ACCURATE STATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF
U.S. ACTIVITIES IN JUNE AND EARLY JULY.

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the 46 day period between June 1 and July 16, 2008, there were no less than 27 stories - all favorable -- broadcast or printed in Turkmenistan's state news media on the U.S. Embassy, its visitors, or programs. This period included state media coverage of the departing Charge d'Affaires, a variety of cultural programs, USAID activity in Turkmenistan, an Embassy-sponsored Educational Fair, the visit of USTDA's Dan Stein, and an exploration of the broader bilateral relationship. The high frequency and accuracy of favorable stories about the United States would have been impossible to imagine prior to reforms instituted under President Berdimuhamedov. END SUMMARY.

STATE MEDIA COVER TURKMEN PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH U.S. CHARGE
D'AFFAIRES TO TURKMENISTAN

13. (SBU) On June 30, the "Watan" TV evening news program gave broad and generally accurate coverage of the farewell meeting between President of Turkmenistan and departing U.S. Charge D'Affaires, Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland. The program emphasized both sides' satisfaction with open and constructive intergovernmental dialogue. President Berdimuhamedov noted the significance of present Turkmen-American cooperation at a new stage with new dynamics. Despite placing too much emphasis on the Charge's comments about new construction in Ashgabat, the program accurately reported discussion of the importance of developing effective partnership in the spheres of trade, energy, agriculture, education and healthcare. Similar reports on the following day appeared on the front pages of the state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 33,391). On the same day, "Owaz" International Radio broadcast (Turkmen) accurately reported the meeting; and pro-government website "TURKMENISTAN.RU" (Russian, English) carried a similar article. (NOTE: Information in print outlets, radio and on websites were based on June 30 "Watan" TV news program material. END NOTE.)

STATE TV COVERAGE OF PRESS-CONFERENCE WITH CHARGE D'AFFAIRES TO
TURKMENISTAN

14. (U) On July 3, the "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) accurately highlighted a

farewell press-conference with Charge Hoagland, which had originally taken place on June 30. The broadcast emphasized the importance of Turkmenistan's international cooperation with foreign countries and organizations. It also noted the "farewell" meeting of Charge d'Affaires with President Berdymuhamedov and that the press-conference had been held the same day. The program included accurate translations of remarks by the Deputy Chief of Mission and Public Affairs Officer thanking the Charge for his contributions during the last year.

STATE TV CHANNELS COVER INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY CONCERT

15. (U) On June 1, "Yashlyk" TV channel (Turkmen) evening program carried accurate coverage of the post-organized concert in honor of International Children's Protection Day, held the same day. On June 2nd, "Altyn Asyr" state TV channel carried accurate coverage of the concert with interview remarks by U.S. Embassy officials included. On June 3, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) accurately carried a 15-minute piece on the concert, which also contained interviews. The coverage by all three state TV channels included a rare and accurate mention of the Embassy's donation of musical instruments to various Turkmen schools and an orphanage. (NOTE: Admission of donations or assistance has been virtually taboo in state-controlled media. END NOTE.)

MEDIA COVERAGE OF VISITING USAID REGIONAL DIRECTOR

16. (U) On July 13, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried a generally

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accurate 20 minute program, which featured an interview by USAID Regional Director, William M. Frej. The program emphasized Turkmenistan's mutually beneficial cooperation with international organizations and generally focused on USAID activities in the country for the past 15 years. The interview gave a broad picture of USAID's work in agriculture, economic reforms, education, and healthcare in Turkmenistan.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL FAIR

17. (U) On July 16, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried a thorough and accurate story on an Educational Fair supported by the U.S. Embassy. The event mainly focused on the educational and research opportunities in the United States, but also featured representatives of the UK and Indian Embassies who promoted similar programs to their countries. The broadcast showed the broad enthusiasm among Turkmen youth interested in studying abroad. An accurate article about the Educational Fair appeared in the state-run daily "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" on July 14, which provided significant detail about many of the available opportunities. (NOTE: Coverage in state media exceeded coverage of the same event last year. END NOTE.)

POSITIVE COVERAGE OF USTDA DELEGATION'S VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN

18. (U) On July 16, the "Watan" TV evening news program reported on the visit of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) Director for Europe and Eurasia, Daniel Stein, and his meetings. The following day, on July 17, "Watan" accurately carried coverage of Stein's meetings at different ministries and agencies, and emphasized the constructive nature of his visit, as well as the prospects for further bilateral cooperation. The same day, based on the "Watan" TV news stories, state-run daily "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) printed a short article by Turkmen State News Service (TDH) about the USTDA visit. Russian news agency "RIA Oreanda" also carried a similar article.

STATE TV COVERS AMERICAN CULTURE DAYS IN TURKMENISTAN

19. (U) On July 2, the "Watan" TV news program accurately reported on "American Culture Days" held in connection with U.S. Independence Day. The report fully described the visiting performing groups and their events organized by post. On July 8, "Turkmenistan" TV

channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried accurate coverage of a joint concert by a U.S. Air Force band and a Turkmen Ministry of Defense musical group in celebration of U.S. Independence Day. The program highlighted the active interaction of the two military musical groups and that they performed each others' national music. It also included images of uniformed personnel from both sides performing and warmly interacting. On July 9, the same TV channel covered another cultural program: the appearance of visiting Native Nations Dance Troupe and Albuquerque's "Red Ryder." Both broadcasts included interview remarks by performers, who emphasized the value of increasing Turkmen-American friendship. On July 14, the Watan" TV news program carried accurate coverage of the Native Nations Dance Troupe's performances in four cities outside of the capital within the "American Culture Days" program.

AMERICAN CULTURE DAYS IN THE STATE PRINT OUTLETS

¶10. (U) On July 3, the state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 33,391) carried an article on "American Culture Days" by the Turkmen State News Service (TDH). The article introduced the performing groups and highlighted their planned performances. On July 5, the state-run daily "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) ran an article on the U.S. Air Force Band's joint performance with Turkmenistan's military band. The article called the performers, "musical diplomats," supporting the principles of peace and friendship. On July 8, the state newspaper "Watan" (Turkmen, circ. 30,091) ran a similar article highlighting performances by both the

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Air Force Rock Band and the Native Nations Group. On July 10 and 16, state-run daily "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) carried similar articles about Native Nations Group and the "Red Ryder's" performances at various places, including in the provinces.

STATE MEDIA INTEREST IN BROADER BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

¶11. (U) On July 11, the state newspaper "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791) ran a lengthy article on Turkmen-American mutual understanding. This article was based largely on an interview with the Embassy's Public Affairs Officer, who gave an overview of U.S.-Turkmen relations, exchange programs and other programs of interest to the public. The author also highlighted "American Culture Days" in Turkmenistan, as a key example of a vigorous bilateral relationship.

¶12. (SBU) In addition, a TV journalist from the "Turkmenistan" Channel has been working for weeks on a broader documentary on the U.S.-Turkmen bilateral relationship, especially as it has developed in the last year and a half under President Berdimuhamedov. He has already conducted interviews with Public Affairs staff, USAID representatives, and attended the "farewell" press conference for Charge d'Affaires Hoagland. He recently offered to work with Public Affairs to check for inaccuracies as his documentary develops. This is unprecedented.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Turkmenistan's state-controlled news media are still firmly under the control of the government and still support official policy. And all U.S. coverage is placed in the context of the country's successful foreign policy under President Berdimuhamedov. It is likely that increasing coverage and interest in U.S. Embassy events is due to directions given from above. However, PAS has observed the increasing self-initiative and openness of individual journalists who have reached out to the Embassy informally. The expanding coverage reflects a continuing positive trend with regard to official Turkmen opinion of our bilateral relationship. The continual exposure to U.S. programs and events in Turkmenistan is reaching Turkmen audiences on an increasingly frequent basis, providing useful and accurate information, as well as developing a positive image of the United States in a country known for its lack of access to information.
END COMMENT.

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